**Westbourne Neighbourhood Plan**

As always, we are using the pages of the Westbourne Magazine to update the parish on progress with **the** neighbourhood plan.

In the October issue of the magazine, we tried to explain the complexity of the process. Not only are we obliged to work within the somewhat rigorous constraints imposed by the Chichester District Council Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework but we also need to assess the availability, achievability, suitability and sustainability of any site before it can be considered for development. Not until a site has passed all the tests associated with these criteria can the criterion of acceptability be applied.

The exhibition in the parish hall back in July served two main purposes. Firstly, it represented the first opportunity to share with the community all the sites that had been put forward by landowners. Secondly, it provided the people of Westbourne with the chance to express their preferences regarding the 16 sites. These preferences were noted and have – as was the intention – informed subsequent work on the plan. They will, of course, be communicated - along with a comprehensive overview of the entire consultation process - in the pre-submissions document, which we are hoping will be submitted by the end of this year or very early in 2016. This document, which will be available to everybody in the parish, will form the basis of a six-week consultation period.

‘Hoping’ is very much the operative word. Whilst the parish, through the consultation process, has made its preferences very clear, there is still the small matter of the availability, achievability, suitability and sustainability criteria. Some of these have yet to be fully resolved. Acceptability is a unique feature of neighbourhood plans but, perhaps somewhat unfortunately, it does not take priority over the other aforementioned criteria.

Misunderstandings have sometimes occurred, probably a consequence of development in the parish being a highly emotive issue. Furthermore, the situation may not always have been helped by the need, at times, for confidentiality to be maintained. Rumour abhors a vacuum! However, rest assured, we are doing all we can to deliver Westbourne with the neighbourhood plan it needs and deserves and are very grateful to those who have supported us in this process.

Should you wish to communicate with the Westbourne Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, this can be done via the village website or the parish clerk. We look forward to hearing from you.

Richard Hitchcock